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ABSTRACT

Little reliable evidence exists, but observers agree that much student-perpetrated violence and disruption is caused by school policy, school procedures, and various types of habitual behavior that distinguish different schools. Focusing remedial efforts on those attributes of schools that precipitate deviant or delinquent behavior is both more economically efficient and educationally productive than directing resources toward individual controls or remediation. Much student behavior is heavily influenced by organizational attributes that are not directly related to classroom instruction. Those organizational characteristics constitute norms that strongly influence what people do in the school. Personnel in disruption-prone schools must learn to recognize these norms and must be taught how to implement new ones. To create the desired educational climate, it is imperative to bring together all levels of the staff, thus minimizing status differences and opening communications. (Author/JG)

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TITLE: CREATING NON-DISRUPTION-PRONE SCHOOLS

REPORT TO SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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February 20, 1976

Little reliable evidence exists concerning the precise extent to which schools cause violent or disruptive behavior among students, but observers agree that a considerable proportion of the student-perpetrated violence and disruption is caused by school personnel, school policies, school procedures, and various types of habitual behavior that distinguish one school's "personality" from another. Certainly, any policy that attempts to ameliorate violence without correcting the causes that originate in school will not relieve the situation. Some practices aimed at curbing or controlling student behavior when their disruptive behavior is rooted in deeper organizational and educational problems actually can exacerbate the situation. Furthermore, focusing remedial measures upon these attributes of schools which precipitate deviant or delinquent behaviors is both more efficient economically and more productive educationally than directing resources toward individual controls or remediation. Though some traditions deny it, self-discipline is learned and should be viewed as a major goal of the curriculum; so the control of disruption is as much an educational responsibility as is the correction of mathematics incompetance.

A Matter of Perspective

Whenever school violence or other forms of disciplinary problems are discussed discussants must be cautioned to keep the matter in perspective. While disruptive behavior has increased in the past decade, the total amount of deviant behavior, overall, is miniscule when considered as a proportion of the total

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population involved. Even the most disrupted schools (with rare--extremely rare--exceptions) are less disrupted in terms of "crimes" per 1000 population than their parent communities. Even school personnel are inclined to exaggerate "war stories" as though they are general rather than unusual occurrences. Consequently, it is easy to overreact, and reactive remedies can cause more problems than originally existed.

What Characteristics of Schools Cause Delinquent Behaviors?

Few people, even those immediately occupied in America's schools, are aware of how rapidly and thoroughly our schools have become highly impersonal, depersonalizing institutions. Administrative and instructional practices, adopted with little recognition of their consequences, have become widely accepted in the education profession and have imperceptibly introduced miseducational and maladaptive procedures that are unquestioned and uncorrected in classrooms, schools, school districts, and colleges. Often those practices have been initiated to correct some genuine problem; so, they have gained wide acceptance and are now grounded in highly organized vested interests. For example,

> not too many years ago, teachers often had to teach (or at least be in their rooms) during the full day and cover various duties at lunchtime as well. They justifiably demanded some free time of children and "non-classroom" duties. Many school boards have granted free time by assigning lunchtime duties to paraprofessional or volunteer personnel. In that process, teachers lost contact with children engaged in activities outside the restraints of classroom roles and tasks; consequently, instructors lost much of the repsect and trust that could be gained from freer interaction with children outside classrooms. School personnel have been removed still further from their clients with a loss in both instructional and disciplinary rapport. Teachers could have gotten badly needed time free of children without the loss of rapport if problem solvers had been aware that teachers' lunch times do not have to coincide with children's and that extra classroom duties often bear more than casual relationship to effective instruction.

That illustration is only one of many maladaptive practices that have been introduced into schools since 1950, creating conditions that cause and sometimes teach delinquent behaviors. Critics should bear in mind that the practices were introduced to solve problems and the resultant ill effects often are imperceptible to people directly involved.

Current concepts of school administration have produced at least the following characteristics which may be found in most schools:

Centralization of decision-making about even the most minute aspects of school practice with resultant loss of status and responsibility for teachers and middle-level administrators. The trend is inherent in negotiated contracts as well as in administrative practice.

Specialization of functions that are inseparable from the teaching function, resulting in loss of status and influence for teachers and ineffectiveness in instruction. Both administrators and teachers have pressed for specialization.

Reduction of choices and discretionary action for administrators, teachers and students in classrooms and in interstitial areas (even as the curriculum was expanded to provide more choices among curricular offerings).

Standardized procedures resulting in loss of individuality for students as well as instructors and mechanization of relationships within the school.

Separation within the school--classroom from classroom, department from department, youth from age, subject matter from subject matter, administration from teachers, persons from persons, and profesionals from clientele--resulting in fractionation of effort, grave communication problems, and alienation among persons and groups.

Isolation of classrooms from other educational areas, creating "no-man's-lands" in the school for which few people feel responsibility.

Isolation from parents and other community forces, reducing understanding and support and often exacerbating tensions within the school.

The problems produced by these trends are worsened in those schools serving ethnic, economic and racial minorities because of cultural stereotypes and the human tendency to believe that everyone should experience the world in some prototypical (usually an idiosyncratically-defined) way.

Such practices have been so universally accepted (they are now well into their third generation of proponents) that few question their validity. They have become normative; supportive structures and processes are well-established. Consequently, practicing educators have not learned behaviors or attitudes needed to overcome or at least to control the unanticipated ill effects. Miseducational outcomes, disruptive behavior, and lowered achievement often result. The organizational dynamics comprise a more encompassing, more pervasive, hence more powerful curriculum than planned classroom instruction can hope to overcome.

Many behaviors observed in schools are heavily influenced by organizational attributes which are not directly related to classroom instruction.

A. Patterns of communication, problem-solving, and decision-making. Generally, more open, multi-directional, widespread and effective, patterns are related to fewer disruptive behaviors and greater feelings of responsibility among teachers and students.

B. Patterns of authority relationships. Generally, fewer barriers to communication and action, more involvement in exercising authority, smaller status differences, and broader conceptions of what constitutes proper professional behavior are related to a more responsive system, more widespread sense of responsibility and greater commitment among staff and students to meet duties and carry our decisions.

C. Procedures for developing, preparing and implementing rules. Generally, when rules are made by the people involved and when expectations are clearly understood, there are fewer transgressions. The more nearly rules are derived from principles of learning and understanding of normal human behavior, the more effective they are. The more the school operates like a community as opposed to a prison or army, the fewer the problems.

D. Relationships with parents and community forces. Generally, more open transactions with parents and other community members result in better opportunity to improve achievement and behavior within the school. This stipulation has little to do with the "neighborhood school" concept (since most such schools exhibit poor relationships) but is a product of interaction with whatever parents and other agencies are served by the school regardless their geographic location.

E. Processes for dealing with personal problems. Generally, greater recognition that people within the school are complete persons who have lives outside the school and problems that are not directly related to school matters and more responsive school mechanisms stimulate greater commitment to participate fully in the work of the school.

F. Curriculum and instructional practices. More broadly conceived concepts of curriculum, with content and processes appropriate for the students served and greater variety and diversity tend to reduce discipline problems within the school.

Those six organizational characteristics constitute a living curriculum that teaches students and teachers "how we behave around here." Those learnings are subtle but they constitute the tradition, rules, and habits that are the norms of the school. Those norms strongly influence what people do in the school.

To the degree that those norms combine to produce a "disruption-prone" life within the school, its fundamental processes must be changed to become educationally productive. Such changes sometimes can be effected by moving and transferring personnel, but quite often new personnel are helpless against the standard operating procedures of the school. Often they do not even recognize how the processes affect behavior. Simple recognition of the subtle relationship between behavior and the attributes of the system in itself can be a powerful force for change.

It seems evident that personnel in disruption-prone schools must learn to recognize the norms and must be taught how to implement new ones. The new norms must make a difference in the lives of people in the school.

1. When decisions are made and procedures established, the educational growth of individual students takes priority over concerns such as adult convenience, pleasing superiors, saving face, or maintaining tradition.

2. Staff and students exhibit a sense of accomplishing something that they feel is important, giving a positive tone to the climate of the school. Both students and staff can speak about growth that has taken place, giving tangible examples of changes that have occurred in both adults and students. While discontented with the way things are, they focus on growing and do not punish themselves for being short of perfection.

3. A sense of direction and mutual purpose is shared among a significant number of staff, students, and (to some extent) parents. They can describe some goals and achievements in specific, understandable terms.

4. Practices and procedures are related to the explicit goals of the school, and counterproductive practices are changed or eliminated as speedily as alternatives can be developed.

5. Faculty members and students exhibit behavior that reflects feelings of personal responsibility for what occurs in the school. People tend not to wait for George to do what needs doing.

6. A large number of the personnel (staff and students) are involved in the school's activities--in planning and in implementing. Participation is high and widely distributed. Nearly all members feel that the school belongs to them, and each feels he can make a difference in it.

7. Problems do not fester; they are identified and resolved. The question, "What can we do?" replaces the sentiment, "It can't be done."

Anyone who wishes to reduce school disruption must aim to change life within schools toward those norms. Three possible remedies hold promise.

1. Initiate and sustain processes within school buildings to effect new styles of communicating, deciding, and implementing. Utilize knowledge from adult education, social science, organizational development, and group development to <u>develop new norms</u> for life within the school.

2. Initiate staff development for school personnel to enable them to practice and utilize skills for changing the schools, utilizing knowledge that currently has not been used in teacher training programs (available from the same sources listed in 1).

3. Stimulate pre-service teacher and administrator training programs designed to develop the full-range of skills for promoting not only cognitive, but applicative and behavioral development in schools.

At the same time that these efforts are undertaken, it would be useful to have strong programs of child advocacy originating both within and outside the school. Presently, child advocates can easily become persona non grata within schools and colleges, and outside stimulation can be highly valuable for assisting change from within. During the past decade, most gains in educational rights of children have come from outside sources, primarily through threatened or actual legal intervention. Those gains could be capitalized upon by implementing the three types of programs listed above.

All three kinds of effort would have common elements because all three would have the same goals, summarized as understanding, directing and utilizing forces inherent in the life within schools and classrooms to promote learnings essential for self-discipline. The curriculum for both pre-service and in-service programs should include theoretical frameworks made usable by guided applications relative to the following types of knowledge:

I. The Teacher as Person
   A. Effects of Role upon Educators
      1. Miseducational and non-educational pressures upon teachers.
      2. Escaping narrowness in the role of educator.
      3. Developing adult responses to professional and personal problems.
      4. Escaping dependency in the role.
      5. Accepting and utilizing criticism.
      6. Giving feedback to superiors, to peers, and to subordinates.
   B. Effects of Personality upon Educators
      1. Dealing with ones own emotions, motivations, needs and drives.
      2. Dealing with authorities.
      3. Accepting and utilizing ones own authority.
      4. Accepting ones weaknesses.
      5. Dealing with ones own emotions.
      6. Recognizing and dealing with anxiety.
      7. Preventing prejudices from becoming self-fulfilling prophecies.

II. Effectively utilizing the Dynamics of Human Groups in Schools and Classrooms
   A. Characteristics of groups
      1. Tasks.
      2. Communication.
      3. Division of labor - (roles).
      4. Norms and traditions.
   B. Patterns of Influence in groups
      1. Unequal distribution.
      2. Winning prestige.
      3. Styles of leadership.
      4. Developing personal style.
   C. Communications in groups
      1. Effects of judgments upon problem-solving.
      2. Listening.
      3. Overcoming blocks to communication and blockers.
      4. Expressing feelings.
      5. Nonverbal clues.
      6. Effects of perception.
   D. Facilitating and Delimiting forces in groups
      1. Helping relationships.
      2. Perceptual limitations.
      3. "Real" limitations.
   E. Diagnosing ones own typical patterns of working with groups
      1. Listening.
      2. Soliciting feedback.
      3. Giving feedback.
      4. Trying new behaviors.
   F. Identifying alternatives and Securing Resources
      1. Brainstorming.
      2. Force field analysis.
      3. Overcoming dependency.
      4. Selling ideas.

III. Fostering Behavioral Changes in Students
   A. Effects of the student role upon learning
      1. Dynamics of the peer group.
      2. Group dynamics within classrooms.
      3. Dependency and its effects upon learning.
   B. Individual student influences upon learning
      1. Self-Concept.
      2. Perception and self-fulfilling prophecies among students.
      3. Statistical averages vs. individual differences.
      4. Behavioral modification.
   C. Developing effective group processes to foster learning
      1. Restructuring groups.
      2. Securing needed resources from within and without the school.
      3. Behavioral modification.
      4. Restructuring physical characteristics of the school.
      5. Utilizing rules to enhance learning.
      6. Effectively utilizing specialists, paraprofessional, and volunteer resources.
      7. Offering choices.

D. Managing classroom processes.
   1. Identifying ones own managerial style.
   2. Establishing structures that promote both cognitive and behavioral learning.
   3. Teaching the norms (or habitual ways of operating) of the room and school.

E. Diagnosing to enhance learning
   1. Diagnosing individual learning.
   2. Observing groups at play and work.
   3. Differentiating "games" from serious misbehaviors.
   4. Separating ones own prejudices and perceptions from others' behavior.
   5. Describing behavior.

F. Establishing the Helping relationship
   1. Among adults.
   2. Among children.
   3. Assuring "due process" to teach self-discipline.

G. Providing adult models within the school
   1. Engaging in problem solving.
   2. Child advocacy.
   3. Dealing with crises.
   4. Accepting personal responsibility.
   5. Developing effective assertiveness.
   6. Dealing with personal emotions.

IV. Operating the school to Promote Learning

A. The School as a Social System
   1. Informal structure of schools.
   2. Formation of cliques among teachers and students.
   3. Influence of territoriality upon behavior.
   4. How hierarchical structure influences communication and group formation.
   5. Identifying the habits and traditions governing behavior in a school.

B. The Political Processes of Life in Schools
   1. Inclusion and exclusion and the impact upon behavior.
   2. Conflict management.
   3. Overcoming the "Peter Principle."

C. Organizational Properties of Schools
   1. Functions and disfunctions of bureaucracies.
   2. Bureaucratic concepts governing behavior in modern organizations.
   3. Goal displacement in public service organizations.
   4. Separation and isolation vs. collaboration.
   5. Effects of school reputation upon behavior in the school.

D. Learning in Extra-Classroom areas
   1. Building a sense of community.
   2. Socialization in cafeterias, hallways, restrooms and playgrounds.

E. Utilizing Community Resources
   1. Ethnic and social class influences upon American Education.
   2. Political structure of American Communities.
   3. Social services available to citizens.
   4. Community resouces for supplementing instruction.
   5. Establishing rapport with parents; home visits.

V. Effects of School District, State and Federal Policies on Learning
   1. The rights of children: case histories and legal bases.
   2. Segregation and desegregation: effects upon teachers and children.
   3. Institutional racism and classism: effects upon school policy.
   4. Effects of labelling upon behavior and treatment.

A. Processes for policy development in school systems
   1. School boards and their duties.
   2. State legislation and administrative policies.
   3. Basic politics of school legislation.
   4. Collective bargaining and union activities.
   5. Relationships between school boards and school staff.

B. How school policies influence school discipline
   1. How policies are made.
   2. Keeping perspective when others are panicking.
   3. Manifest and latent goals.
   4. Career routes in American school systems.
   5. Impact of specialization upon educational programs.
   6. Impact of departmentalization upon programs.

Teachers currently receive no training in most of those areas. School principals receive surprisingly little. Consequently, their introduction on any large scale comprises a long-overdue innovation in professional development. Though overdue, such innovation will suffer from lack of sufficient personnel capable of providing the necessary instruction and might well encounter resistnace from teacher training institutions and administrative groups. Teachers' organizations may see the strength of the proposal, but might as easily resist them if they are seen as uncompensated job expansion.

The intent of the developmental program is to surround the student with adults who have a sense of self-worth, ability and responsibility and who will reflect that sense as they participate in the daily life of the school, in their interactions with one another and with students, and in their approach to the problems that impinge upon life and production within the school. The primary aim of the program is professional <u>practice</u> of the principles, not merely academic knowledge of them. Integrating knowledge into practice requires

instructional methods that have been used successfully in applied social science fields but have not been widely accepted in educational preparation programs. It is vital that instructors (or trainers or facilitators) possess abilities:

1. to facilitate communication and interaction among teachers;
2. to identify problems or situations that result in avoidance behavior among staff members and between staff and principal;
3. to provide opportunities for the release of feelings and to use such situations to create alternative solutions in problem solving;
4. to provide opportunities for the staff to acquire and increase their range of skills and techniques in the following areas:
   a. active listening
   b. classroom management
   c. coping strategies
5. to increase awareness of the feelings of others and of self.

The major obstacle to implementing the proposed staff development and preservice programs is an insufficient number of capable instructors; therefore, any policies must strive for a "multiplier effect" while at the same time avoiding the superficiality that often attends such endeavors. It might be useful to staff a few geographically distributed centers for training key personnel (perhaps college professors and school principals) who will then apply their skills with local groups of educators. To create the desired educational climate in a school building, it is imperative to bring all levels of the staff together thus minimizing status differences and opening communications. It would be useful to have a facilitator in each building so long as he or she could avoid the pitfalls of being "resident expert." At any rate, the weight of existing evidence clearly indicates that the school principal must be involved because of the key role he or she plays in determining what occurs in schools and because overcoming resistance located in the principal's office consumes almost all of the effort and minimizes results. So, the principal must be a major target for the effort, preferably in conjunction with other members of the school staff.

A Final Note

In the final analysis, school disruptions can only be corrected by intervening in those forces that cause them. Those causes that originate in the schools must be corrected in local schools. Federal policies, like state policies and even local district policies, cannot hope to overcome the problems unless they trigger and sustain responsible, effective action on the part of teachers and principals and other personnel in the schools.

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